DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 264 657 EA 018 170

AUTHOR Demmon-Berger, Debbie
TITLE What Are You Doing for the Gifted and Talented?
INSTITUTION National School Boards Association, Alexandria, VA. Educational Policies Service.
PUB DATE Nov 85
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT Updating School Board Policies; v16 n10 p1-3,6 Nov 1985

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academically Gifted; Acceleration (Education); Advanced Placement Programs; Community Attitudes; Elementary Secondary Education; Enrichment Activities; Magnet Schools; *Student Needs; *Talent Development; *Talent Identification
IDENTIFIERS *Frederick County Public Schools MD

ABSTRACT

Although 70 percent of the 1,600 schools responding to a survey by the Sid Richardson Foundation in Forth Worth, Texas provides some sort of program for the gifted, this was often found to be only "enrichment." An example of a school system that has gone beyond enrichment is that of Frederick County, Maryland. The system provides an elementary magnet school; and for the middle and high school students there are homogeneous groupings that give students the opportunity to learn at an accelerated rate, advanced placement courses, and early college entrance programs. Another example can be found in the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, area where four school systems are scheduled to begin programs for gifted students. Because programs for the gifted and talented are vulnerable to budget cuts from communities that label them "elitist," school boards involved in developing such programs are advised to sell them to the public and work closely with teachers, administrators, and other staff. They should also consider the need for more intensive counseling for gifted and talented students. A policy on gifted education should state how children are selected and placed, and the types of programs and arrangements provided. In addition, the policy should address how credit may be given for accelerated courses completed outside the school system, teacher selection and inservice, guidance services, and program evaluation. (MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Updating SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

Volume 16/Number 10/November 1985

A component of the Educational Policies Service of the National School Boards Association provided to NSBA Direct Affiliates and EPS subscribers

ED264657.

What are you doing for the gifted and talented?

by Debbie Demmon-Berger

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Floyd

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 018 170

Updating SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

Volume 16/Number 10/November 1985

A component of the Educational Policies Service of the National School Boards Association provided to NSBA Direct Affiliates and EPS subscribers

What are you doing for the gifted and talented?

by Debbie Demmon-Berger

It is ironic that in the wake of the furor raised by the National Commisson on Excellence in Education, gifted and talented education still is fighting for legitimacy.

Or perhaps the irony is that even in egalitarian America, gifted and talented education is doing so well.

On one hand there is a public outcry for more quality education; on the other hand, an insistence that this improved education has to stop at the mean.

As an article in *Time* magazine pointed out nearly 10 years ago, "To single out the best and the brightest in public schools [strikes] many as uncomfortably elitist."

It still does.

Ensuing debate

Proponents of gifted and talented (G/T) education argue forcibly that gifted youngsters don't always make it on their own, that too high a percentage become bored with school and eventually drop out, that the gifted are a valuable natural resource not to be squandered. Some of the nation's best students are being lost, they insist, even though it is from this group that the problem solvers of the world evolve.

Still, many school administrators who have no trouble justifying expenditures for special education or other programs falter when it comes to gifted programs. In fact, one recent survey found that 57 percent of school administrators did not believe they had any gifted students. So it is easy to see which programs go when budgets must be cut.

To some extent, high intellect still poses an embarrassment to public education as well as to parents themselves. It may be perfectly acceptable to boast of an offspring's feat on the high school gridiron, but in some circles it's definitely taboo to mention a gifted progeny's ability to do cube roots while everyone else's kids still are learning to add and subtract.

Debbie Demmon-Berger is a Maryland-based freelance education writer.

Excellence v. conformity

Educator and philosopher Sidney Hook, while a senior research fellow at Stanford University, addressed the issue when he acknowledged that, "There are some who mistakenly believe that because a democracy must repudiate the notion of a ruling social or political elite, it must therefore be hostile to the idea and existence of an intellectual or cultural elite defined by excellence or performance. There is a danger that the cult of conformity will make the pursuit of excellence seem educationally subversive."

California parent Deborah Olstad, after witnessing the phenomenal difference in her son after he entered the state's gifted program, pointed out that gifted children need special programs just as much as handicapped youngsters do. "These children have personal and educational characteristics that are different," she said. "The difference is a matter of intensity. Craving for knowledge, ability to concentrate, curiosity, a capacity for abstract reasoning—qualities found in all of us—are found in the gifted child to such a degree that traditional educational programs are not adequate or appropriate."

Addressing gifted needs

Many school boards, moved by state or local mandates, have taken steps to address the gifted child's differing capabilities. Gifted and talented education is growing even though some educators believe that fewer than 40 percent of the gifted students in the United States are reached by existing programs.

While only 18 states mandate programs for the gifted and talented, recent surveys reveal that 35 states provide funding to support such programs. And that funding has increased, from $68 million in 1978 to $181 million in 1983. Only a few states do not have a full-time education department person responsible for G/T programs.

A four-year study commissioned and funded by the Sid Richardson Foundation (Fort Worth) addressed questions of quantity versus quality. June Cox, of the Gifted Students Institute and author of the study, said that more than 70 percent of the 1,600 schools responding to their survey provide some sort of pull-out program for the gifted. But she called this a "part-time solution to a full-time problem." Cox said, "Enrichment is a kind of a dodge; when we looked at substance, it just wasn't there."

Says Julian Stanley, founder of Johns Hopkins University's talent search program and proponent of intense acceleration for brilliant students, "Enrichment is such a lovely word .... But in most cases it covers a lot of dull repetitive activity that slows things down to where the teachers think they can handle them."

Beyond enrichment

The Frederick County (Md.) school system, a largely rural district of 24,000 students that sprawls from the northernmost suburbs of Washington, D.C., to the Pennsylvania border, has gone beyond enrichment. Frederick's program, which features an elementary magnet school, may be unique in that it

continued on page 2

EA 018 170

continued from page 1

addresses the needs of first grade G/T students and soon may look at adding a preschool program. Most G/T programs begin no earlier than third grade.

Says Russell Beaton, coordinator of Frederick's program, "Many [school systems] feel that kids have so many ups and downs earlier [than third grade] that to label them that early is premature."

Beaton acknowledges that there have been some students identified in grades one and two who have not lived up to their promise. But it is in the early grades, he says, when many of the truly gifted might become stultified, might "turn off" from school. He also believes it is significant that a number of school systems have sent representatives to study the Frederick program.

Evolution of program

Frederick's G/T program originated some eight years ago when the system's Five-Year Committee decided that the needs of gifted students were not being met. The county commissioners, who have funding authority in Maryland, cut the program in two consecutive years, contending it was elitist and that more important needs existed.

In 1981, the state of Maryland made block grant money available to local districts. The school system decided to bypass the commissioners and use grant funds to underwrite a magnet school for students in grades one through five. The magnet school, which is housed in an unused portion of an elementary school, is designed for the upper one percent of students who are both academically talented and highly motivated.

These are kids, says Beaton, who become frustrated with routine and with drill; who exhibit leadership qualities; who have a creative outlook; who are bored with kindergarten and first grade; and who are reading one to two years above grade level. But not all of the identified youngsters elect to attend the magnet school, and there are many bright students not selected. For them, there is an enrichment program at the home school.

Programs for higher grades

While the magnet approach isn't continued for Frederick's middle and high school students, the system's use of leveling, or homogeneous grouping, gives top-level students the opportunity to learn at an accelerated rate. There also are Advanced Placement (AP) courses at the high schools, and able students who wish to earn college credit can participate in an early entrance program at Frederick's Hood College, amusingly titled Hood Start.

Further development of the middle and high school programs is one of several priorities to be addressed, according to Beaton, who believes the G/T program should be comprehensive through grade 12.

Identifying the gifted

Another priority, in Beaton's opinion, is the dilemma of broadening the identification process and addressing minorities. But efforts to seek nominations from a much broader range last year led to nearly 1,000 nominations for the 50 first grade magnet school slots. While Beaton acknowledges that the nomination process needs additional fine-tuning, he nonetheless is concerned about gifted youngsters who aren't presently being identified.

His concerns are shared by Hans Jellen, an education specialist at Southern Illinois-Carbondale, who points out that gifted programs based on teacher nominations and achievement tests often identify only the overachiever. Teacher recommendations, according to Jellen, only filter in "the academically clever and conforming, not the gifted. They are simply overachieving teacher's pets, which the gifted are not."

Beaton makes particular note of the difficulty in identifying bright minority students. He says the schools need to develop a conscious plan that recognizes the primary reason minority kids aren't being identified is that they don't get the same early learning support that many middle and upper class white youngsters do. One possibility, said Beaton, is to address the problem at the preschool level.

Frederick not alone

Much of what the Frederick school system has done, or is attempting to do, is reflected in the recommendations of the Sid Richardson Foundation study that soon will be incorporated into revamped programs in four school systems in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. They include:

- Allow students to progress as they master skills, but downplay graded

Identifying the gifted

The process used in Frederick County to identify gifted students is composed of several steps:

- Initial nominations from classroom teachers, parents, other instructional staff such as a librarian or a principal, and interested community persons such as a physician or scout leader familiar with a child's giftedness;
- General screening including parent/teacher/student questionnaires, reading assessment for kindergarten students being considered for first grade G/T and current language arts/math levels for older children, and teacher/principal recommendations. Selected kindergarten students generally can read at a first/second grade level or higher, and older students test in the 8th/9th stanines on standardized tests;
- Students in the top one-fifth of the group based on weighting the provided information are tested (Renzulli checklist and Wisc-R individualized intelligence test);
- A screening committee reviews the data and selects approximately the top one percent for placement in the magnet school. No minimum cutoff score is used; some students may be identified as right for the program even if their test scores are lower than others.

Updating School Board Policies is published eleven times annually and provided to every board member and the policy administrator of school districts that are members of the National School Boards Association's Direct Affiliate Program or subscribers to NSBA's Educational Policies Service. EPS Staff: Dale Gaddy, director, education and management services department; Brenda Z. Greene, editor; Carol MacDougall, editorial assistant; Eve Shepard, clearinghouse manager.

Information presented in EPS/NSBA publications does not necessarily reflect official NSBA viewpoints.

Copyright 1985 National School Boards Association. All Rights Reserved. Permission to reprint articles may be requested through the editor.

NSBA President
Mack J. Spears

NSBA Executive Director
Thomas A. Shannon

Associate Executive Director
James Betchkal

Assistant Executive Director
Robert F. Lucas

classrooms and avoid the gifted label;

- Develop written guidelines for able learners, carefully select coordinators for the program, assess the identification process, and include a system of evaluation;
- Broaden the methods of identification and selection;
- Cast a wide net for students who might benefit and give attention to minority students;
- Build a comprehensive program that covers kindergarten through twelfth grade and serves all areas of talent.

Action plan

For those school boards involved in developing G/T programs, Frederick's Beaton makes these suggestions:

- *Try to link up with another school system with a similar fiscal makeup to find out what's in place and what's possible.*

From Cleveland's vintage Major Works program to North Carolina's School of the Arts, there is no end to the programs that address the very specific needs of differing communities, whether it be an after-school enrichment program one day a week or a full-time comprehensive magnet school program. Seeking information about existing programs and visiting those that are practical can save much time in the planning stages, advises Beaton. A good review of selected high school programs is incorporated in *Curriculum Review* (2/85).

- *Sell the public. It will never work by just saying, "We want to do something for the gifted."*

In Frederick, the county commissioners repeatedly cited elitism as a factor for rejecting the gifted program. It is a criticism that school systems contemplating G/T programs must confront head-on.

The Talcott Mountain Academy, a two-year-old private school near Hartford, Conn., is a case in point. It is the state's only school designed exclusively for gifted students, with heavy emphasis on math and science, and serves 60 youngsters in grades five through eight.

Herbert Chester, superintendent of the Bloomfield, Conn., schools, was quoted in *Newsweek* magazine as believing Talcott "sets up an artificial environment." Replied Donald LaSalle, director of the Talcott Mountain Science Center, a nonprofit regional research facility, "Anytime you innovate you're going to rattle some cages. If elitism makes excellence, fine. We need more excellence."

Dennis Allen, an Ohio school administrator, points out that every school system operates a program for the gifted, and a very elitist one at that: "It's called football."

James J. Gallagher, director of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center (Univ. of N.C.), suggests that the question of elitism is overworked. "We are accustomed to separating students with outstanding abilities in music or athletics, and we should also recognize that society enthusiastically supports elite education for older students in special schools for the gifted, like Harvard Law School . . . .

"Actually, where the gifted students are placed for instruction is less important than what happens to them when they get there. They need more sophisticated content to match their advanced development and a strong emphasis on thinking skills that encourages full use of their intellectual powers."

- *Work closely with teachers, administrators, and other staff so people don't get mixed signals. Don't assume the staff is going to support this gung ho.*

There are many educators who believe that magnet schools skim the best youngsters from the home school to the detriment of the students remaining there. Subtle ways of undermining such a program include failure to nominate obviously bright students or comments made to parents that encourage them not to allow their youngsters to participate in a G/T program.

- *Lay out a plan that says what you'd like in the total program—then break it down in segments—so you can see the full-range picture of where you're going. You won't look like you're jumping on whatever bandwagon is coming around the corner.*

Basically, there are two approaches to G/T education: acceleration and grouping, either through a magnet program, classroom leveling, or pull-out enrichment classes. Often a combination is used.

The most common form of acceleration, aside from out-and-out grade skipping, is the Advanced Placement class at the high school level. There also are talent search programs operated by universities, such as Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth, that allow highly able students, as identified by their performance on the SAT, to enroll in accelerated courses during the summer.

Just as there are many G/T critics who cite elitism as a barrier to programs, there are many G/T proponents who feel that pull-out programs and magnet schools aren't the answer either.

"The world isn't gifted," points out Hans Jellen. "The gifted have to learn to get along with others. If you insulate them in special schools, how will they acquire sensitivities? You would develop an intellectual elite who would be immediately frustrated when they had to deal with the rest of the world."

On the other hand, Donald LaSalle was quoted as saying, "A gifted child is gifted all the time, not just for a few hours on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday."

Beaton notes that these students often don't do well in conventional classrooms. Because of the teaching techniques used in the special classes, they "are encouraged to think, to solve problems . . . in a certain way that is very free, very analytical, very mature, very open-ended. The kids who achieve (honor roll recognition and high standardized test scores) are often those who can drill, who can regurgitate the definitions.

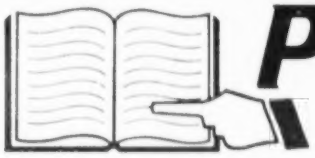
"I believe many of the kids who do well in high school do so because they sublimate their own learning styles to that of the teacher. The kids at (the magnet school) are encouraged to do the opposite, to go off and do the unusual."

- *Consider the need for more intensive counseling for G/T students.*

Although not specifically recommended by Beaton, this is an area many educators believe is ignored when G/T programs are developed. G/T teacher Joyce Bruchey notes that she spends a great deal of time helping her students cope with the stigma of being "gifted."

Parents in small towns and rural areas in particular often are reluctant to have their children placed in gifted programs because of the difficulty the labeling causes. Students, especially those approaching adolescence, are not comfort-

continued on page 6



policy Adviser

People in our community want to use metal detectors on school property to locate "treasures." Can we control the practice?—*Administrator, Virginia.*

One man's trash is another's treasure they say. But when the "treasure" is on school property, some rules are in order. You want people to know that they can't wander over school property uncontrolled—especially during the school day when children may be outdoors, and that they will be held accountable for damage to school property. Your policy on Public Conduct on School Property (EPS Code KGB) should include a statement controlling trespassing on school grounds. If the use of metal detectors in your community is a real problem, you may want to address their use specifically. Be sure to publicize the school policy, explaining how and why the use of metal detectors interferes with school operations.

If there is a serious community demand, you might score some points with the community by making the treasure hunt an annual event—with supervision provided by the school system, of course. If there really are items of value to be found, however, you may want to turn the amateur archeology into a school fund-raising project. ■

continued from page 3

able with being different. Skilled counselors can help them deal with the situation.

Barbara Kerr, director of the Guidance Laboratory for Gifted (Univ. of Neb.), points out that the gifted child's range of interests, tendency to strive for perfection, and the high expectation levels of parents and teachers often wreaks havoc as the child attempts to plan a career. These students "clearly will have a difficult time pursuing a single career path," said Kerr at an American Psychological Association meeting.

Guide through policy

Clearly, there are a variety of ways to respond to the needs of the gifted. Whatever approach you take, however, you should have policies that will guide the program through its development and implementation. A policy on gifted education should contain at a minimum how children are selected and placed and the types of programs and arrangements provided. In addition, policy should address how credit may be given for accelerated courses completed outside the school system, teacher selection and inservice, guidance services, and program evaluation. ■

Clearinghouse alert

The EPS Policy Information Clearinghouse is soliciting copies of local school system policies or regulations relating to the disease AIDS. Send to: Clearinghouse, NSBA, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, Va. 22314.

For more policy help

Sample policies relating to the topics covered in this month's *Updating* are included in the school administrator's copy of this publication. These are:

Gifted and Talented Education: IGBB, Programs for Gifted Students.

AIDS: JHCC, Communicable Diseases; KNAF, Relations with Health Authorities.

Missing Children: JED, Student Absences and Excuses.

Access to School Grounds: ECA, Buildings and Grounds Security.

Additional sample policies, regulations, or exhibits on these and other topics may be requested from the EPS Policy Information Clearinghouse, NSBA, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314.

NSBA DIRECT AFFILIATE
National School Boards Association
1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314